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Source: *New Literary History*, Vol. 29, No. 3, Theoretical Explorations (Summer, 1998), pp. 353-383

Published by: [The Johns Hopkins University Press](http://www.jhu.edu/publishing/)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20057488>

Accessed: 18/06/2014 20:53

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Marxism and the Historicity of Theory: An Interview with Fredric Jameson

Xudong Zhang*

I. The Historicity of Theory

Xudong Zhang: *My first question concerns the overall outlook of your theoretical language and the constitution of your methodology. It is a common view that you combined Marxism and structuralism—not Structuralism per se but the general emphasis on language and textuality since the so-called linguistic turn—to make these things indispensable to one another in your critical practice. Is this picture misleading? Could you explain the way in which these dimensions become intertwined in the development of theory in general and in your own interventions in particular?*

Fredric Jameson: Several things have to be said. First of all, what we have called structuralism or theory in the largest sense, ranging from psychoanalysis to linguistics and everything else, not as a precise term but as a general historical term, emerged within the Marxist problematic. If we limit ourselves to France, the dominant French thought right after the Second World War was, of course, existentialism. But it very quickly became existential Marxism. And that was the point at which structuralism as a problematic began to emerge. I do not mean the structuralist position—particularly that language is the ultimate determining instance, but the question as to the relationship of language to other social levels emerges from the Marxist framework, which did not yet have an answer for it. I would say in general that you could probably show where all the specific themes of poststructuralism emerged from this Marxist problematic, which was at that point attempting to arrive at a more refined notion of culture and ideology.

I also want to add something else: The other important influence I have been interested in lately is that of Brecht, because Brecht's

*Conducted at the 1995 MLA convention in Chicago, this interview is included in *Wanqi ziben zhuyi wenhua luoji—Zhan Mingxin ping lun wenxuan* (Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism: Critical-Theoretical Essays of Fredric Jameson), ed. Xudong Zhang (Hong Kong, 1996; Beijing, 1998), 1–49.

appearance at the Théâtre des nations in Paris in 1954 was really a very decisive event. Brecht was not normally thought of as a philosopher or theoretician. But his dialectic also set an agenda that would turn out to be poststructuralism—something in particular to be called antihumanism. In Brecht you have the simultaneous attack on the bourgeois classical tradition that Lukács, for example, defended, as well as on the socialist humanist tradition of which Lukács was obviously also a proponent. Then this antihumanism was further developed by people like Althusser—Althusser wrote something on Brecht incidentally, so there was a direct connection. So the point I want to make is that you can certainly read various poststructuralist texts outside their history for their immediate truth value, but if you want to put them in context to see how the problematic was developed, then you have to look at the larger Marxist framework. In a country like France after the War, an overwhelming percent of the intellectuals thought they were Marxist. At any rate at least they found the Marxist problematic—class struggle, modes of production, how to connect base and superstructure, what the nature of ideology is, what representation is—essential to their programs.

Another thing to be said about this first point is that it also explains why, surprisingly for some, we get this intervention of Derrida, in his book *Specters of Marx*. It is because, I think, now that France has de-Marxified, and many fewer intellectuals consider themselves Marxist, the great theoreticians—this is true for Deleuze, too, although, unfortunately, he did not have time to write his Marx book, but it is also true for others—understand more acutely how their own framework built on the Marxist problematic (again I do not want to say Marxism). And I think what Derrida was trying to rescue there is a multiple thing: he is making commentaries on certain texts of Marx, he is making a political intervention in a situation in which there seem to be no radical alternatives back to the moment. But I think he is also trying historically to save that base of Marxism from which he himself in an idiosyncratic way emerged.

As to the problem of what the relationship is in specific cases, I believe this has to do with the nature of theory itself. Theory emerging after the end of great philosophical systems, in a kind of market environment, has tended to become a whole set of different name brands. If that seems too frivolous to say, then we can say that theory exists as named theories, as specific idiolects or private languages. The whole point of the philosophical system is to take a mass of ideas in the air of all kinds and give them a single coherent language, conceptuality, and set of terms. In that sense, the end of philosophy means that no one thinks that coherence is possible any more. This means that we have to speak all these theoretical languages all at the same time. There really is no way to

synthesize them into a master language, nor is there even a desire to do so. I think this situation then creates some of the appearances you are alluding to; it looks for one minute that we are talking about Marxist language, but suddenly you begin to sound like a Jakobsonian structuralist, or Lévi-Straussian, or Lacanian, or something like that. I am often accused of eclecticism in this respect, but I think we have to think about it in terms of language. It is as though we could say certain things sharply only in French, but what you can say sharply in German is less clear in French; you can say certain things in Chinese, but that does not work in French, and vice versa and so on and so forth. So the ideal would be switching languages depending on the problems you are addressing, but obviously that is also next to impossible. That is why I believe there are far closer connections between the various Marxist problems and some of those poststructural theories with which on first glance you do not see any relationship.

I guess it is very difficult to pursue these discussions without some reconstruction of the historical development. I would like to hope that when I explain some of these complex things for myself, that can also serve as an introduction to some of the more primary theoretical philosophical questions. But I have to keep the names there. If I just speak of these without the names, it would look as though I am claiming the ideas for myself. That is not the case. It can often evidently be bewildering when you get all these philosophical references without knowing the original texts.

X.Z.: *The common perception is that you are both “French” and “German”: The French side being “poststructuralist,” and the “German” side dialectical—the Frankfurt school, and so on. Now you are saying that the “French” aspect is not purely linguistic or “theoretical” but also part of the Marxist problematic.*

F.J.: That is right. It is an accident of my own background that I am fluent in both French and German, and that I had contact with both national traditions as a student. I always found it as understandable as it is strange and deplorable when people take sides for the French against the German or the German against the French. On the other hand, as I said before, I do not think syntheses are desirable. I also think that to borrow back and forth is not very successful. I am thinking in particular of the moment in the 1970s when Adorno became better known in France. Then the so-called “anti-identity” side of Adorno—a German theme, so to speak—became enlisted in French poststructuralism’s attack on Marxism. I think that does violence to Adorno’s thought. But how you dialogue between positions is very complicated. You recall the attempts of Habermas to talk to Foucault, or Foucault to talk to

Chomsky, or vice versa. Except on basic political and cultural matters, a simple dialogue between these languages is not possible. I believe myself that I am Eurocentric to the degree that I believe that the French and the German are the two great philosophical-theoretical traditions. I happen to have been formed in that atmosphere in which Anglo-American thought—empiricism and common language philosophy and Wittgenstein and logical positivism—was really in some sense an obstacle for me. All those things seemed to me to be a “resistance to theory,” as Paul de Man puts it. Therefore it is often objected that I am not sufficiently hospitable to these things, even though they have included interesting thoughts, beginning with Peirce in the Anglo-American tradition. But my basic frames of reference remain French and German.

X.Z.: A brief interruption: It is very helpful for you to point out the historical moment and situation in which your theoretical interventions emerged. Bearing in mind the readership outside the West, there is still a tendency to read any positions in terms of a division among conservatism, liberalism, and radicalism. Would you like to say something about the relationship between Marxism and liberalism—the latter being both an intellectual tradition and cold-war ideology—in post-War Europe and America?

FJ.: Well, I think whatever Soviet Communism was, the liberal position in the West since the end of the War was very largely defined as anticommunism and as anti-Marxism. Therefore, for many of us, it was discredited. Now there is a revival of certain kinds of liberalism, which is relatively less tainted, because they do not have to, at least verbally, be anticommunist anymore, whatever their deeper political commitments. But I think that one must understand that most of us expected nothing productive from that essentially cold-war liberalism, which essentially colored Anglo-American philosophy.

X.Z.: You understand by asking this question I am curious not so much about the structural relationship between Marxism and liberalism but about the habit for many to see things in terms of a position-taking between radicalism, liberalism, and conservatism.

FJ.: I understand that. I think it is a matter of existential politics, which we all do. But I think it would be best to begin with the philosophical questions themselves and only later to decide if these are liberal positions, radical positions, or conservative positions. Because all these poststructuralist themes and problems can be inflected in a number of directions. While it is essential that at the end of the line

political judgments be made, I think the problem initially should be analyzed and discussed in terms of their inherent, immanent conceptuality. The same would be true for works of art. I have always stood for political, social, and historical readings of works of art, but I certainly do not think that you start that way. You start with aesthetics, purely aesthetic problems, and then, at the term of these analyses, you end up in the political. People have said about Brecht that, for example, whenever in Brecht you started with aesthetics, by the time you came to the end, you came to politics; and whenever you started with politics, at the end you came to aesthetics. I think that is a much more desirable rhythm for these analyses. But that of course makes my positions sometimes very ambiguous for people, because they want a political message right away, whereas I am interested in going through the problems or the aesthetic form in order eventually to get to a political judgment.

X.Z.: *A particular figure to mention here might be Heidegger. What is Heidegger's role in the constitution of philosophical-theoretical operations, both in Marxism historically and in your own case?*

F.J.: It depends on the national situations. I studied in Germany in the early 1950s. Heidegger had not been allowed to teach again until 1951. The Germany I knew was intellectually Heideggerian. The Frankfurt School's influence came only much later. Meanwhile, in France, he had French disciples. The French soldiers who captured him in the woods around Heidelberg asked for his autograph. Nonetheless, the penetration of Heidegger in France after the war was much slower. Then we have to mention Derrida, who clearly placed a certain Heidegger on agenda. But this was not the Heidegger that the Germans knew, not the ontological Heidegger. Rather, this was the destruction-of-metaphysics Heidegger, who played a different role. To think of Derrida as a Heideggerian is a very odd thing, because he certainly does not take ontological positions of the Heideggerian type. He is not interested in ontology. For him, that is the more deplorable side of Heidegger. But Heidegger is essential to the operation of deconstruction because of the historical problems—essentially problems in the history of philosophy—which were also posed by him. So it is very complicated. I think Heidegger is now gone in Germany, a country now massively, almost completely, dominated by Habermas. Of course there are now American Heideggerians, and this is a thriving industry. New manuscripts are still coming out. My own formation is Sartrean; therefore there was a lot of Heidegger I did not need any more, because Sartre's version was selective and to my mind more "advanced" (in the way it posed the

problem of the other, for example, or in the originality of its relationship to psychoanalysis).

I would like to add, though, that I think there is a part of Heidegger which is very consistent with Marxism. This is the so-called pragmatic Heidegger: the Heidegger of the tool, of work, and production, and so forth. This is the phenomenology of daily life, which for all kinds of historical and philosophical reasons was never part of Marxism. It is an empty framework or square in the whole Marxist problematic that was not developed. But the Althusserians thought that the notion of everyday life was ideological. So the pragmatic side of Heidegger becomes very attractive as a basis for the Marxian notion of praxis. Some of that was also in Sartre in a different form. Sometimes in Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* that whole analysis of Dasein as active first and contemplative only later on seems to me to be sharp and more usable within a Marxist framework.

X.Z.: *How do you describe the presence of Heidegger in your own language? Or, is there any?*

FJ.: When I studied in Germany I read some of Heidegger fairly intensively, although I was much more interested in *Sein und Zeit*, the so-called existential Heidegger, than the later, "ontological Heidegger." I have always admitted that I found Heidegger's ontology very attractive, provided that it is understood to be a utopian one rather than a description. I think this is the problem of all phenomenology, by the way. It is a utopia rather than a description of our alienation, of what we actually live. But then there is a big problem in Heidegger, which I think is the whole notion of modernity and technology. It seems to me that this problem does not achieve a philosophical solution in Heidegger. It marks a problem he never adequately solved. The famous "Ge-stell" was so enigmatic that I do not think that anybody has really cracked that nut and found a concept there, let alone a translation. I think that it is a place Heidegger wishes desperately to think. Obviously the postmodern framework with this new technology of cybernetics and so forth makes it more urgent to try to think this in different ways, which Heidegger never encountered. So I guess I could say that at various moments of my life I have been a fellow traveler of Heidegger. But I cannot say that this was the strongest influence on my own work, except for this notion of activity, production, praxis, and so forth.

X.Z.: *So the perceived Heideggerian moment in your work, when you use terms such as "Being" and "deconcealment," should be understood in utopian terms.*

F.J.: Yes, exactly. I think there they can serve as a very dramatic way to mark the space of utopia. But it is not the only language I would use. And it of course has its disadvantages. From a utopian perspective, a “being” is essentially the individual human being and the being of Nature, so the social is evacuated from those later things in ways that are less useful for us.

X.Z.: *Recently there seems to be some interest in figuring out your career or intellectual development, which for many remains miraculous in some senses. For instance, in the preface to your Geopolitical Aesthetics, Colin MacCabe describes your career in a very interesting way. He says that you spent more than two decades working out your theoretical premises “patiently”; and, once that was achieved, it was replaced by a “riot of cultural analyses.” He describes it in a way in which yours seems to be a very deliberate self-design and personal strategy.*

F.J.: I was very gratified by Colin’s essay, which I think is one of the few that has really given an overall picture of my work. I do suspect that Colin wishes to downplay the more specifically Marxist side of things and the political elements and so forth. I wouldn’t necessarily tell the story that way myself, although I can see that the story he tells has a certain persuasiveness. I would not myself start like that. I would say that between methodological questions there are always tensions which open onto larger philosophical problems. Ultimately, this goes to the base and superstructure problem if you like, that is to say, how do you link culture and consciousness to the context or to the situation? It is the tension between those terms that set the terms for interrogations in any reading of any individual text. So when one talks about the “riot of cultural analyses,” the same thing can be said about my literary work. That is, there is a tension between a whole methodological-philosophical side of things, and the reading of the individual, literary text, just as much as between that and the reading of any specific mass-cultural text. I don’t think that the problem is one of passing from a general canonical or literary set of preoccupations into some more mass-cultural, Cultural Studies environment. I seem to have written more on films and mass-cultural things in the last few years. But actually I have several very long literary analyses that have not been published. I think the two demand very different approaches, which I would not necessarily want to combine. But the real problem, the real alternation here is between, let’s say, the general and the particular, between specific readings and the more general theoretical approach. I am not sure that I would say that first I took care of my theoretical problems and then I moved on to those specific analyses. In this new global capitalism, in this age of

postmodernity, the older theories that one involved for the earlier world of modernity must now also be rethought. I consider that the theoretical task. The speculative task is not finished and done with, allowing one simply to do readings. Rather, it is also an ongoing one, which surely demands further theoretical works.

X.Z.: *What is implied here, other than a career design, might be something like this: conceptually, you can still, for a moment, concentrate on your theoretical-philosophical infrastructure, so to speak. Then that infrastructure can serve as a sort of inner drive and mode of thinking, which motivate and navigate your journey through a fragmented terrain.*

F.J.: The notion in *The Political Unconscious* of the three levels of context, the three frameworks—historical, political, economic—in which one can focus a concrete context implies that you could work on an immediate social-historical level (then you might be talking about the whole roll-back of the welfare state). You could also talk in the larger context, the class dynamics, which are slower, and include the history of classes, their memory of their struggles and their defeats. Then, finally, you can talk on this largest level of the mode of production. So, already, in that notion of the three levels, was implicit the sense that the context was not only the here-and-now politically, but could be approached in somewhat longer time frames. I use there, maybe without saying so, Braudel's idea of multiple temporalities and longer or shorter *durées*. I do not often write in terms of specific political struggles, partly because works of art take somewhat longer to write and to put together anyway. It is only in mass culture that you get a more immediate kind of response. But there is a time lag involved even in those most ephemeral cultural statements. I certainly admire the people whose task is immediate cultural and political commentary. I am not sure I am best qualified to do that kind of work, particularly because my formation is not in American Studies but in other languages and national cultures.

I also want to add a rather different kind of remark about what Lukács has meant to me. One of the things that Lukács taught, and one of the most valuable, I think, is that the form of work of art—and I would include the form of mass cultural product—is a place in which one can observe social conditioning and thus the social situation. And sometimes form is a place where one can observe that concrete social context more adequately than in the flow of daily events and immediate historical happenings. I guess I would resist the idea that I start with aesthetics, then I look around for some historical context, and then put them together, even though Marxist analysis has often been understood in those terms. And there is a truth in this, because we are attempting to

look at the aesthetic and extra- or nonaesthetic simultaneously. That often makes for a slippage between these two realms. I think the clumsier Marxist analyses do tend to take this form of a break in the essay in which, first, you put all the social facts, and then, you turn to the work and talk about form and ideology. That in principle ought to make writing Marxist analyses interesting, because there is a fundamental formal problem in writing such essays that demands to be solved; there are no ready-made solutions in advance. But I think what Lukács meant to me is that ideally, one should somehow get to the content through the forms.

To that I would add something else. The difference between Lukács and this humanism that Brecht attributed to him in a critical, negative sense is that Lukács always talked about achieved form, successful form. It seems to me rather that we have to look at failures of form, the impossibility of certain kinds of representation in a certain context, the flaws, limits, obstacles, which become the clue to the social truth or social meaning, and not so much canonical success in that old Lukácsian sense.

X.Z.: When you say that, do you have in mind the mass cultural products or the avant-garde "work of art"?

F.J.: What makes the matter of determinate representational failure interesting is that it happens to both. I think the most interesting way to look at mass cultural debates is precisely through just these failures as formal failures and formal impossibilities. Of course, we can also talk about failures, formal flaws and constraints in so-called high literature. That would be the point, I think, in which what is to me a more adequate kind of cultural studies would not feel obliged to choose between literature and canon on the one hand, and television and pop music on the other. It seems to me that these are dialectically part of a united field. The most interesting comments on both sides are made by those who are, like people hesitating between France and Germany, committed to both rather than to taking sides for one or the other: the one being elitist, the other being populist. I understand why that is done. Sometimes I feel that way myself. But I do not think that is ultimately a very productive attitude.

X.Z.: *I think your readers would understand very well that both the social-political and the aesthetic-theoretical are constant in your critical intervention. And that is one of the most persuasive aspects of your work. But I am wondering if the "theoretical moment" in your career can be seen as a moment of intensification, a process of encoding in which you acquired not only a style or*

philosophical form, but also power, subjectivity, some kind of organizing principle, which now enables you to engage the field at a different level. Given that your position is perceived as a privileged one, meaning that when everybody gets stuck in a schizophrenic world, you still maintain a certain kind of coherence, continuity, and energy, the politics of which is not determined only by your immediate social-cultural location. Does that have to do with the “decades” of theoretical mortification, so to speak?

F.J.: There, too, we have to make an historical remark. The theoretical books [*Marxism and Form* and *The Prison House of Language*] which precede the later analyses (in McCabe’s view) were written at a time when neither of these two traditions [the French and the German critical traditions] were very well-known in the Anglo-American world. So my task was partly to introduce and popularize these things. But then with translation, with wide dissemination and the greater theoretical sophistication that the American intellectuals began to acquire in the 1970s and ’80s, that particular kind of project was no longer necessary. Or if it is the case of newer theory—I guess this is the question about whether newer theories are being produced—then other people are better qualified than I was. That is the one note I want to make.

The second is that for me the practical readings have only been interesting insofar as they contain a theoretical point. That is why this connection between theory and interpretation has always been very close. It is an odd fact, a strange paradox, that just because you are excited about an object does not mean that you are qualified to write well about it. One would think that one would always have something to say if you are interested. There are great cultural journalists whom I very much admire and whose gift is to respond immediately to all their situations and objects. But for me, the works that I have felt empowered to write about are always ones that allowed me to focus on a specific theoretical problem. I think the reverse is also true. That is, even though sometimes it does not seem that way, the theoretical problems that interested me are the ones that ultimately had a connection to interpretations of specific texts. There is a whole range of philosophical problems that do not interest me at all, because they do not bear on this. That may also have something to do with this connection you are talking about.

As for the motive for the speculations on postmodernism and postmodernity, I would say that before the 1980s, historical contexts seemed more clear and stable than they began to be in the 1980s and 1990s. When I began to think about these things, at least what I described as postmodern suddenly seemed to be connected up with some very basic structural changes in infrastructure, in the economic, in

globalization, and so forth. That then again gave me a coherent framework to look at all these things as manifestations of the larger cultural logic or experience of the period.

II. Marxism and Late Capitalism

X.Z.: *But this framework of periodization is basically a Marxist one.*

F.J.: Yes, of course. I consider this essentially a Marxist periodization. I have colleagues and comrades who feel that this is giving in to the most frivolous tastes generated by capitalism. But I think of the notion of periodization in terms of realism, the relatively limited national framework of capitalism, imperialism, this larger global—not yet global in our sense, but larger worldwide—expansion of capitalism, and finally the whole dynamic of this new globalized capitalism. I think these are stages in the evolution of capital, and their conception is profoundly Marxist. That is why I am often pleased when people try to avoid terms like late capitalism, because that shows that they understand that some terms are at base political ones and imply political positions. There is the accusation that I do not think enough in terms of class. That may be so for certain kinds of things. But I believe in class, class dynamics, and class struggles. These are always present. Only today they take very complicated forms. There is no clear-cut working class ideology. There is no clear-cut ruling class ideology either. It is a more complicated game. I would not want to say that Marx was an economic determinist, but for me the important historical, original, unsurpassable thing about Marx and Marxism is that it requires you somehow to include the economic. It requires you to work back in such a way that you finally touch economic structures. If you limit yourself only to class, that can very rapidly turn into political considerations of power; then it begins to lose its connections to the economic structure. That is why I often felt hesitation about the emphasis on power coming out of Foucault and others today, which I think sometimes is a little too easy. For me, the theory of the postmodern stage is an economic theory. If you do it right, you have to end up talking about capitalism. Therefore, the coherence of my work comes from the stage we are in. The Marxist component comes from this ultimately economic dynamic of the stage.

X.Z.: *In that particular sense, Marxism becomes a philosophy, or does it?*

F.J.: No. This is the value of Derrida's latest work, which reminds us insistently that Marxism is not an ontology, and should be neither an

ontology nor a philosophy. I agree with that. What is very peculiar about both Marx and Freud is that they are this thing which in the Marxist tradition is called a unity of theory and practice. That means that there is not a philosophical system of Marxism that you can write down, rather, there are some very important philosophical implications and speculations, which offer the construction of something like the presuppositions of a Marxist philosophy, that is, Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*. I have even perversely suggested that Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* could be that. But there are many others. I think that the deplorable mistake of the so-called eastern, orthodox, or Soviet Marxism was the idea that you could have a full picture of the world called dialectic materialism, that could be written down the way the old philosophical treatises were written down. You start with matter and move on to this or that. I am very resistant to that notion. I can see why in loose terms one can still talk about various Marxist philosophies. But I would not want to think Marxism is a philosophy in that sense.

Now the other thing people sometimes do with this word is to say, not that Marxism is a philosophical system, but, even worse, that it is that rather different thing: a philosophy of history. I think that objection demands a different approach. There is certainly an ambition to think history in Marxism, and I am very interested in the so-called philosophy of history—it seems to me that those are some of the most exciting texts we have, which range from bourgeois philosophies of history, to Ibn Khaldun or St. Augustine or Thucydides. I must feel generally that it is not quite right to call Marxism a philosophy of history in that sense either. But that is a different matter from Marxism being a philosophical system.

X.Z.: *You invented a now widely circulated term—metacommentary—to indicate a certain mode of cultural-intellectual production and intervention. The ground cleared by this notion is, in your case, and probably in the way this notion functions, reserved for Marxism. In that respect Marxism does not seem to be just another brand name in the market, at least not for those who write along that line. For others in the field, it seems that you can always draw from a historical and theoretical source, from which they would rather disengage, but which allows you somehow to place yourself beyond the field.*

F.J.: You could say that in several ways. You could say that in terms of these theoretical discourses and, finally, despite everything I have said about the various theoretical discourses, there is a Marxist theoretical position that is more privileged than others. But today there are a number of different Marxist theoretical discourses, so one cannot really say that exactly. Is it, then, the survival of the older philosophical

foundation, which for old antifoundationalists is suspicious? That would be so, if Marxism altogether were a philosophy in their sense. I do not consider that accusation to be entirely accurate either. I would also want to say that there are probably people who do metacommentary who do not know what they are doing is Marxism. I do not think that one has to be conscious of this intellectual commitment to have a Marxist view of the world. After all, Marxism has really suffused into all the disciplines to the point where it is present and active without any longer being a separate field or specialization.

As for the idea that I have some secret truth that nobody else has, well, the whole point of the public sphere is that you make your own interpretation and then people take it or leave it; they find it plausible or not plausible. The real problem, I think, is that a lot of the interpretations made today do not push things far enough, and are thus not really in the running. Or else they are not aware of themselves as ideologies. I do think that there are Marxist ideologies, that we are all ideological in our specific situations, national, personal, psychoanalytical, and so forth, which determine generally very deep ideological and classical commitments that we are not always aware of, and this is true of Marxism as well. All the great Marxist thinkers, including Marx, came out of specific personal, class, and national situations. What they have produced, alongside what Marxism calls "science," are a number of Marxist ideologies. I try to be interested in a range of those [ideologies] and move back and forth. I am not sure how to describe my own personal view of Marxism, and am perhaps not particularly interested in turning it into another brand name ideology.

X.Z.: *Does the view that Marxism has a certain power over other theoretical discourses have to do with its internal unity, its interest in "grand narratives" and "totality"?*

FJ.: Let me try to answer that question by going back to the notion of theory being an idiolect or private language. My feeling is that if you are going to address a range of people formed in different disciplines, you have to be able to translate these things and speak their language up to a certain point, even if you seek to undermine or criticize it. What I would like to propose is that this sort of belief or philosophy that people think they see unifying my work is, rather, a translation mechanism. I would like to defend the idea that Marxism is a far more subtle and supple mode of translating between these languages than most of the other systems. It is true that the great universal systems—Catholicism, for instance—had that once; maybe Catholicism still does. There was great power in the way in which certain kinds of Catholic theologians, the

Jesuits, for example, were able to pass from one philosophical language to another. Marxism is the only secular version of this capacity I know today. I do not think structural linguistics or semiotics has that ambition, nor was it successful; and there remains to be analyzed from a historical point of view the connection of the various semiotics with existentialism and with Marxism. It is a very interesting historical story. But I think Marxism remains the only one of these translation techniques or machines that can encompass all these things.

If you want to say that this is a privileged thought-mode, then it is because of that, not because you insist on knowing the truth. It is because you mediate between these various theoretical codes far more comprehensibly than anything these codes themselves allow. Žižek now wants to tell us that Lacanism is just such a translating code, or better, one that includes the dialectic and Marxism. I have always been fascinated with Lacan, and I am certainly willing to toy with that idea, which Žižek does a good deal better than I do. The notion of mediation between these codes is the crucial one, not the truth-power of one code or philosophy—like Marxism—over the other. Reality takes care of truth; the codes are our business.

X.Z.: The purported “power” of Marxism, at least in the case of your work, might also have to do with the notion of productivity, with the way you absorb things and mediate between them theoretically. Many people might not have the opportunity, or interest, or energy, to encompass such an enormous space.

FJ.: Well, I suppose people tend to develop certain passions through their work, and once they have achieved the formal expression of these passions, they feel relatively exhausted. Maybe that gives a different way for coming at this question. That is to say, my relationship with Marxism is not so much in terms of belief or truth but rather interest. Politics is, after all, the most interesting thing in life. It seems to me that it is politics and political commitment that gives one some perpetual drive to confront new problems. Many people on the Left have become fatigued now at the end of Soviet communism, because they do not know where that drive is going, or they turn around to invest back in local issues. Whereas for me the question of what capitalism is, what alternatives to it are possible, remains a burning issue.

Things look very different now than they did twenty years ago. So I have my continuing interest in retheorizing these things. I hope I do not come to a period where I am not interested in any of these problems any more. But that can happen to people. But I prefer to put it in terms of a kind of interest which drives one, rather than any preconceived notion

of political engagement. Because those vary and you are not always in a political situation where action is possible, knowing what the stakes are, and so forth, particularly at this time. The interest in connecting culture to economic situation has for me been constant, even though as both of these things change, the nature and structure of that relationship has also changed.

X.Z.: *Does that translating, mediating mechanism enclose a coding system in itself and generate its own theoretical formulations?*

F.J.: It is a coding system, all right, but I think it is also a problematic. I think one could look at whole range of stuff I have done in terms of the central problematic that I continue to feel to be significant. If it is a matter of dialogue with other theories, then we have a range of new theories, from gender theory to Postcoloniality. They demand a rather different kind of theoretical engagement.

X.Z.: *The reason why I am so persistent in getting an answer for that is this: for a Chinese reader looking at the world through the prism shaped to a considerable degree by "Western culture," "Western scholarship," or "Western theory," any understanding of his or her own sociohistorical situation must be at the same time an understanding of the mechanism of that medium or that factor. In pursuing the historical truth, some kind of methodological "truth" tends to be de-historicized to accommodate the need for figuring out what is going on in the structure of the Western cultural-intellectual world. In that sense, your work—and probably the works of "Western Marxism" in general—has been a preferred site, because, for one thing, it seems to allow people to absorb things while maintaining a comprehensive critical subject-position.*

F.J.: This then becomes for me the problem of the dissemination of my own work in other national situations. I do believe in the primacy of the situation, and I also think it is very foolish to say that nations have disappeared. I think that there is today certainly much more give and take between intellectual communities. But it seems to me that intellectuals are anchored in their specific national situations. That would give one two ways of looking at this. One would be that the United States is the most advanced, but also the most brutal, form of contemporary capitalism. An American, I think, at this stage may have a certain special position as opposed to, let's say, Europeans—not to mention Chinese. I noticed in Germany on my last visit that there are a range of intellectual issues (about mass culture, for example) that Germans do not have to pose, or at least not yet. My perhaps chauvinistic view is that Americans

are obliged to confront more of these things than most other national intellectuals, no matter how attractive one may find the intellectual climates somewhere else. That would be one thing.

The other thing is that I always conceive my work in a polemic way. Besides these theoretical investigations of culture and its mechanisms that you mentioned, as a Marxist one also has to confront other intellectual ideologies. Therefore, I think that, while, I am sure, in China today and in the Pacific Rim in general, a whole variety of different ideological positions are being developed, there is a way in which I have had to confront a whole range of these things here that may be rather different from what, let's say, a Chinese intellectual would have to face in the People's Republic or Hong Kong or Taiwan or whatever. The enemies may be different, the ideologies might in some cases be more developed, in some cases less. That gives everyone's work a kind of situational specificity.

We all have this nostalgia for the ideal form of the intellectual and the life of the intellectual, whose historical realization, for many people, is France. There can still be a kind of nostalgia for the role of the French intellectual, although that is in serious crisis right now. But that may account for what is peculiar about my own work. Because in the pluralism in the United States that accompanied the emergence of theory in the literary, aesthetic, and cultural field—something that has tended to be rather characteristic of the United States—in a kind of small-group reaction, you decide to work within a certain theory and then you do not have to confront other positions. Whereas I have felt, for better or worse—and sometimes I do it well and maybe sometimes not so well—that I really need to confront all of those other positions somehow. If you want to call it Marxism when one does that by absorbing the languages from inside, showing their limits and so forth, then that may be a special feature of Marxism, as opposed to some of those other literary or cultural ideologies or philosophies.

X.Z.: *Besides the ideal form of intellectual life and cultural activity, people, especially people in the non-Western societies, I suppose, are looking for an ideal form of representation or narrative, a mode of thinking as a way to organize your private and collective experiences, which might otherwise be utterly fragile and fragmented. Marxism seems also to promise some possibilities in these areas.*

F.J.: Absolutely. I think that is the whole point of the narrative of postmodernity, and its relationship to late capitalism. Whatever is going on in the other parts of the world, in the Pacific Rim, for example, it seems to me that everyone in one way or another is caught in this force field of late capitalism (automation, structural unemployment, finance

capital, globalization, and so on). That then, it seems to me, is the organizing dynamic. One does not necessarily solve this fragmented reality in existential terms. One does not map that out or represent it by turning it from fragments into something unified. One theorizes the fragmentary.

It seems to me that this framework that I have developed—for me an historical framework—is the one in which one best does that and best provides a coherent narrative even if it is a narrative that explains incoherence. This is what I think we have to do today. Then we come back to some of the things we have talked about, formal failure, for example. I think it is a mistake to imagine that, because there have been great and successful representational moments in the past, we have to struggle to make a new one now. It can often be the emphasis on the impossibility of representation that gives the clue and organizes things. I think my global narrative does both these things better than the other ones I know of, the narrative of liberalism, of the market, or the various political narratives, of freedom and democracy, or of law and order, and so forth.

X.Z.: So the narrative of contemporary experiences does not necessarily provide a den for renewed forms of interiority or unity, subjectivity, nostalgia, and collectivity. But all these things still seem to play a role, culturally as well as politically, in many situations.

F.J.: Yes. And if one goes on to use that kind of terminology, one can produce other formulations. If coherence is narrative, then—this is a Lukácsian question for me—what do you do when you are faced with stubbornly, intransigently non- or antinarrative materials? Well, if you think about them dialectically, those get turned into narrative, too, but not of the old type.

X.Z.: For readers in many places—China, for example—there still seems to be a die-hard habit to think that once you achieve a narrative, you are “closer” to truth; and in order to achieve that narrative, you have to have a strong subjectivity.

F.J.: One has to say that coherence comes from the world, not from the Self. It is not by doing something to the Self, acquiring belief and convictions, that you can make the world coherent. It is the world, capitalism, that produces both coherence and incoherence. Therefore that is what one must focus on, and not on subject resources of various kinds. Of course one has to invent a certain relationship to the Self in order to get rid of it.

X.Z.: *This is not to say that languages or narratives do not “create” or invent new spaces and subject-positions—in the field of literary and cultural studies in China, as well as in China Studies in the United States, for example, new spaces and positions seem to be produced by different theoretical discourses.*

F.J.: Not at all. But I do not know how we can produce these things by an effort of the will. The owl of Minerva flies at dusk. That means that what one has to be alert to is the emergence of this new being-in-the-world. But that does not necessarily mean that by noticing it, articulating it, then you can bring it further into being and you can have an effect on the world. I am not sure that individuals can produce the new out of themselves, even though they must always be vigilantly alert to it.

Another question is what to do with theory today. A complicated answer, a Hegelian answer to that is: what we often observe in the dialectic or opposition between subject and object is that the subject is part of the object, the subject is being produced by the object. I would say the same thing about theory: that theory did not just come from nowhere, then people liked these disembodied abstractions and took it over and did awful things with them. Theory came out of the situation. Theory is an integral product of this whole new late capitalist situation. So it is itself a newly emerging content and then, as an objective reality of the world, it undergoes its own autonomous development and reacts back on reality, makes changes in thought, in the university system, in the role of the intellectuals, in the production of culture, and so forth.

If one sees theory as just something subjectively willful over against this objective cultural, historical, and social reality that we know, then one is not thinking about theory historically. But theory is part of that historical situation. Therefore, the emergence of theory itself becomes a crucial cultural and historical question to be looked at. And I think this is being done more today than in the early period when all this was new. But there is a reason why it came into being, why, if you associate theory with poststructuralism, structuralism emerged. That was a many-levelled social and cultural event. It was not a whim or some subjective thing, given that even technology itself is also part of the social reality.

On the other hand, there has been this awful, indeed catastrophic tendency in Marxism to say that the New we want is this preconceived formula, and you the artist have to produce it. In terms of the owl-of-Minerva figure, artists are registering apparatus for this new reality. You cannot predict in advance what they are going to do. Whenever you spot the emergence of something new, then, for us intellectuals, that becomes our object of study, and we can try to do something with that Novum. When it fails to emerge, then we go on as before. I think with theoretical production, it is not dissimilar. Just as the work of art is a

registering apparatus, so is theory, and so was philosophy when it was still alive.

X.Z.: *Does Marxism, being a more self-conscious registering apparatus, propose a new solution beyond the realm of instrumental reason, beyond the enclosure of "human desire and social engineering" as liberalism has seen it?*

F.J.: Marxism is not a recipe. There are certainly forms of Marxism that do not do that well at all. I think, for example, just as a personal opinion, that language of rationality is not very helpful. In German there are two words for rationality: *Verstand* and *Vernunft*. The rationality you are talking about is *Verstand*. The view that could encompass that as itself being part of the world rather than the self is this larger thing called *Vernunft*. I do not know if we can reach that right now: it is a very complex relationship of consciousness to the world. But the most crucial thing we can speak of in terms of art, perception, theory, and so on is a certain technique of getting away from the Self and allowing the Self to become this registering apparatus, to pick up these things. I would not want to judge whether things are rational too quickly. The things themselves simply are; they exist in the world, they are real phenomena, therefore they have their historical origin and their ultimate explanation. But I do not think that the language of rationality or irrationality is a very effective way for evaluating them.

In the French seventies, "desire" became a buzzword, not so much in Deleuze himself as in the people inspired by him. All these things seem to me to go back to some attempt to find a single-shot explanation for things, to find the ultimate motive: power, economics, desire, reason, and so on. That is humanism. That is an attempt to make a theory of human nature. Whereas the emphasis on the situation means that the world has a logic and rhythms of development that are mostly very mysterious to all of us individually or nationally. But that is what we need to look at. Then language of ultimate motivations or ultimate drives become less helpful.

X.Z.: *Being a product of modernity, Marxism tends to secularize and demystify. But isn't Marxism also proposing its own notion of authenticity and totality?*

F.J.: The first topic one wants to mention is religion. I have been re-reading Kojève's lectures on Hegel. He makes the point that Hegel is a radically atheist philosopher, but not an antireligious one. Because for him many religions were existent, real social phenomena. They do mystify social phenomena, but it is not by ignoring these phenomena, treating them as delusion or sheer error or superstition (in the Enlight-

enment fashion), that one gets all the way through them and comes out from the other side. I think that contemporary religion is very interesting. For example, there are all kinds of reasons why Islamic fundamentalism has been able today, in the absence of socialism, to stand as this fundamental alternative to the American way of life. Yet I suspect that the new religious movements are of a rather different type than the great, older, all-encompassing religions of older modes of production.

Coming back to Europe, the more specific question is that the moment of the utopian is crucial. We are talking about the dialectic of ideology and Utopia. Demystification is always valuable, even when it is done by people who have no social vision. It is obviously always useful and always painful—it does not work unless it is painful—to demystify the illusions that we all have all the time, in our own individual heads and then floating through society. Marxism was certainly a very powerful form of demystification, and can always still be one, since the economic is what bourgeois people least want to think about, and class is something they would always rather ignore. There is always a job for a more specifically Marxist form of demystification of all those attitudes. But unless that demystification is linked to the vision or the attempt to envision an alternate society altogether, unless there is a utopian component or drive which is linked to the drive to demystify, then it seems to me that the most productive result of demystification is not achieved. Rather than say that Marxism has an other, semi-religious agenda along the side of demystification, it seems to be that one must see the two drives as linked.

But I think there is a difference between, let's say, most of the things we consider to be religious in this historical moment and in this daily life, and the utopian of the future, which you can call religion if you like, but which is also essentially political. Maybe those little Heideggerian moments in my work try to violently or forcefully re-inject that utopian thing alongside the other deconstructive, demystifying operations. My feeling is that it is only that larger, Marxian utopian drive that can compete with various religious impulses. Is the market utopian? Well, to be sure, in some intellectual ways, but I think that is not a Utopia that is really available for very many people on this planet now.

I also want to say that I greatly respect liberation theology and its equivalents in the other great religions. There are reasons why that has been a more effective way of linking social politics in some countries than certain forms of Marxism. But I would prefer the terminology of the utopian. Then you have to remember the whole tradition of vulgar Marxism and Stalinism and their relationships to various different religious movements. That is a very sorry history which has left its mark, of course. So I suppose for many people Marxism is this narrowly

Enlightenment rationality which excludes all those other things. I do not happen to see it that way at all. And indeed, some great Marxist philosophers have made the connections: Ernst Bloch is the most obvious reference, but there are others.

X.Z.: *But you refuse to think of the Utopia in terms of humanism, is that right?*

F.J.: Well, the meaning of those words slips and slides. I think the narrower target of Althusserianism, and of Brecht, the attack on the Soviet idea of the great bourgeois tradition, or indeed on bourgeois thought itself, is something rather different. At least in the West, humanism is organized around notions of the coherence of the individual, the value of the autonomy of the individual experiences. The whole movement of poststructuralism against the autonomous subject is a critique of philosophical reflexes of just such a humanist individualism and forces us to envision the social field, collectivity, community, and so on. But now, of course, there is what is called communitarianism, which is a relatively more right-wing humanism of collectivity, and also deserves to be criticized in perhaps a very different fashion.

X.Z.: *You have explained the socio-political nature of Marxism. But in China, Marxism—to be precise, Western Marxism—is viewed, first of all, as an aesthetic protest against the reification and vulgarization of mass society and, by implication, of “totalitarian” society, too. The moment and the way in which Western Marxism was introduced into China in the 1980s—one example is Liu Xiaofeng’s Poeticized Philosophy (1986), in which people like Adorno and Marcuse were discussed side by side with Schelling, Hölderlin, Heidegger, and so on—made it a more “poetic” and therefore a more appealing mode of thinking than other competing theoretical discourses from the contemporary West. How would you characterize the “poetic”—if not “existential”—aspect of Marxism?*

F.J.: There has certainly been a strong, interesting movement in repositioning Schelling as a source of a certain Marxism, in the work of Manfred Frank and of Žižek, for example. I think the effort involves a certain construction of utopian features of Marxism. That is, it is an attempt to escape from the narrowly economic stuff and precisely to extend Marxism to an existential or poetic vision of how the world could be and how human beings could live in it. To that degree, it is greatly to be valued.

But again, one has to look at the influences of such kinds of poetic Marxism as you call it; one must look at the influences historically, its moment of emergence. Certainly there was a reason in the American sixties for the resonance that Marcuse’s work took on. These things

become political, but in some very much larger sense. That is, one does politics on a number of levels—some are immediately economical, like the strikes in France a few years ago. But one crucial kind of politics is the vision of an alternative. There were reasons why people needed to develop this vision, why these things become important in those moments, in their various national situations. This vision had its own specific political, social, and historical function at that moment. There might come a later moment in which visions of this kind are less useful, to use Brecht's term, than in other situations. I think that one has constantly to replace these things in their historical context and see what their ideological functions were.

It seems to me that this kind of vision is always very important. But that does not mean that is the only kind of thinking or analysis or politics one has to do. In a situation in which life seems far more reduced to rationalization, technology, market, and so forth, then it becomes a very important priority to re-assert the other utopian features of what the transformation of the world will mean.

III. Dialectical Thinking

X.Z.: *So far, it seems to me, you have been focusing on the objective side of Marxism defined by its relationship to the situation. How about the active, to avoid the term "subjective," side of this powerful mechanism for mapping something out, for narrative presentations? I guess this points to the question of the dialectic.*

F.J.: The question of the dialectic is very complicated. There have been Marxisms—Althusser's, for example—that thought we should get rid of this idea all together, partly because it was too idealistic, or perhaps too complicated to explain. I think that, first, there are number of forms that the dialectic can take. It seems abusive, except in a philosophy seminar, to speak of the dialectic.

Also, I think the dialectic has never been fully realized. That is, there is this massive corpus of Hegelian writings, and also Marx's equally massive but much more fragmentary writings. I would prefer to see the dialectic in utopian ways as a thought-mode of the future, rather than as something that once existed in the 1820s in Berlin or the 1870s in London. I think there would be simpler and more usable ways of talking about the dialectic. I see maybe three of those that interest me right now. One would be an emphasis on the logic of the situation, rather than the logic of the individual consciousness or reified substances like society. The emphasis on the logic of the situation, the constant

changeability of the situation, its primacy and the way in which it allows certain things to be possible and others not. That would lead to a kind of thinking that I would call dialectical.

Then, there is the matter of the so-called philosophy or dialectic of history. There, too, the dialectic is a kind of constant, undermining or demystifying various historical narratives already in place, including some of the Marxist ones, like the inevitability of socialism. It would not be an elimination of causality, because I think that narrative and causality go together, and that narrative logic is causal logic. But the dialectic would be an undermining of the received forms of narrative and historical causality. Because if you look at Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, you do not see syntheses in any simple form. Instead, you see a bewildering number of new and more complex social and historical causalities correct those simpler ways in which people tell themselves about history.

The third thing is an emphasis on contradiction. If one insists on that, then one is always dialectical whether one knows it or not, whether one has a philosophical approach or not. It seems to me that we all have an existential stake in not seeing contradictions. We would like things to be stable, we would like to think that time was this habit of presence that has played its role in contemporary theory. We would like to think that we are unified subjects, and that the problems we face are representational and thus relatively easy to think through. If at every moment in which we represent something to ourselves in a unified way, we try to undo that and see the contradictions and multiplicities behind that particular experience, then we are thinking dialectically.

And there are obviously many more pragmatic ways of describing how the dialectic operates in terms of the way we think of the concrete situation, in terms of the way we think of history, and in terms of the way we think of reality.

X.Z.: *The way you describe the operation of the dialectic, especially the entanglement between things that themselves become the form of thinking, reminds me of Benjamin's allegorical mapping of the Parisian space (which is itself reminiscent of Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire). What is the relationship between the dialectic and allegory? For Adorno, the Benjaminian mode was "undialectical."*

FJ.: I guess one should make some proposals. First of all, a lot of people have described the dialectic by asserting that the dialectic is a method rather than a system. In one sense I agree and have sometimes said so myself. But it is also very misleading. Because when you say method, you think that all you have to do is learn some recipe: you could learn it, and then do things, and keep on doing it and being in the truth.

The dialectic is not a method in that sense yet, even though there is something of the spirit of a method in it.

Now, as to allegory, I think that is something else: a mode of representation. The reason why allegory is important is that even though we talk about holding to the situation in its historical changeability, trying to break through old narratives of change and seeing fresh ones and perceiving contradictions, none of these targets were really objects to begin with. Therefore, there is the second problem of how you would describe those phenomena, how you model your consciousness of them, if they are not really things. That is where allegory comes in. Because it reminds us that even if we believe in the situation, the situation is not a realistic thing for us to make a simple representation of; even if we believe in narrative, that also is not so easy. Saying that the world has a narrative structure does not mean that you can tell a simple story about it, or that there are representational techniques existing for doing that. Insisting on contradictions does not mean that anybody ever saw one, or it would be easy to paint a picture of whatever it is. So the insistence on allegory is an insistence on the difficulty, or even impossibility, of representation of these deeper realities. I hesitate to say impossibility, not because it is not so—I do think that it is impossible to represent these things—but because the minute you say that, then you feed into some other ideologies about silence, ultimate unknowability, the chaos of the world, unrepresentability, indeterminacy, and so forth. I do not think that it is desirable. Allegory happens when you know you cannot represent something, but you also cannot not do it.

X.Z.: *But doesn't your own notion of "cognitive mapping," using the metaphor of one trying to figure out his or her situation and become oriented in the urban space, provide a bridge between the two realms of the dialectic and the allegorical?*

F.J.: I have not thought about it that way, but it is an interesting formulation.

X.Z.: *In your view, dialectical thinking cannot be a purely "intellectual" or speculative operation, it is a constant struggle, which involves economics, politics, personal history. . . .*

F.J.: And your own ideologies. No, I agree. The mark of some successful dialectic is shock, surprise, an undermining of pre-conceived notions, and so forth. You can glimpse the truth or the Real, but then your own ideologies seep back—your own illusions of the world, your own wish-fulfillments—and then you are out of it again. There psycho-

analysis offers a good analogy, teaching that the moment of truth is this fitful, fleeting, and painful thing; that you necessarily lose all the time and only fitfully regain.

That is another reason why it is wrong to think of the dialectic as a philosophy. Because presumably in a philosophy you can write down your truth once you have found it. Hegel thought he was doing that (or at least pretended to think so). Capitalism is a much more complicated thing than ontology. Marx knows that you cannot see Capital as such. His book then was a very interesting—as he says—literary experiment, a *Darstellung*: how you put this together some way to have a glimpse of the real; for if the dialectic is as I have described it, it cannot be a systematic philosophy of a representational kind.

IV. Cultural Studies and Locality

X.Z.: *For many Chinese readers, “cultural criticism” is primarily a Jamesonian notion, first brought to them by your visit in 1985. Now “Cultural Studies” has started to gain currency in parts of academia in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. What are the relationship and difference between them?*

FJ.: I think the best way to begin is to say that, taken narrowly, in the United States, Cultural Studies is a new discipline. It is a new place that younger scholars have opened in order to investigate a whole range of what we used to call mass cultural phenomena, all the way from music to television, from gender to forms of power, ethnicity, and so forth; and it has been a very important opening, allowing the intellectuals to grapple more intensely with new forms of everyday life that have emerged in so-called postmodernity.

For other countries—and again the national situation plays a role—Cultural Studies seems to be something rather different, in terms of cultural history, including the literary phenomena, the past, the social movement, and so on. There is often a certain tension or shock when Americans meet their counterparts in other countries, including Britain, where, of course, Cultural Studies first evolved in the Birmingham School. I tend to think that the Americans have been much less historical in what we were willing to include in the past, except for certain specific areas, for example, in Women’s Studies, where history is obviously more necessary. This polemic between literature and mass culture, between the old-fashioned aestheticians and the new-fangled Cultural Studies people has left a deep scar on the project itself. There are obvious reasons for that, and some of them are to be found in the

structure of the academy, while others are to be found in the class structure of the United States, where literature is marked as elitist, and mass culture as populist.

My notion of Cultural Studies would be larger than this one of this generation of younger American intellectuals. But that does not mean that I would in any way wish to depreciate what they are doing and the interest of it. I just think it is very American. The specificities or the exceptionality of American culture is that Americans think that they are in the universal; that somehow we are the end of history; there are no other realities than this one, or other realities are culturally determined—what the French do, what the Chinese do—but the United States is the true and universally human. Therefore, they need not take an historical perspective on this; maybe they do not even need to take a class perspective on this form of scholarship. They do not need to see themselves in terms of their own situation. Yet while it is certainly true that America's culture is late capitalism in some generalizable sense, we do not want to keep a critical distance from it and see ourselves as relatively parochial in some of our attitudes to ourselves and to the rest of the not yet late capitalist world.

When you read *Cultural Studies*, the collection of essays edited by Grossberg and Nelson on which I wrote a long article, you see that the foreigners, particularly the Australians, are quite amazed by this American parochialism which does not see itself that way, which thinks of itself as instantly universal. I guess I am anti-American enough, too, to wish for a little more dialectical self-consciousness about the project, a little more positioning of ourselves in the specificities of our situation. It is late capitalism, but it is an American late capitalism. It is not the way the Europeans operate, it not the way the Japanese operate. I think the absence of that self-critical reflexivity limits the scope of the work of Cultural Studies; that is to say, it blocks the connection of the analysis of the specific object with theory. I have to feel that it is a drawback. The point of doing these analyses is not only to do them for their own sake—although they are very interesting and should be thought through—but also to connect them with the theoretical problematic.

X.Z.: *The appearances of these works are very theoretical.*

F.J.: Right. But much of theory today has, along with the attacks on theory, become antitheoretical, or at least has drawn back from the ambitions of theory. I have to put this in a Marxist framework and in a Marxist perspective, as this whole interview has shown.

X.Z.: *In that particular article of yours on Cultural Studies, published by Social Text, you said that academic politics is the only politics of the Cultural Studies people. What do you really mean by that?*

F.J.: I do not want to be misunderstood on that. Because many of these modes of analysis come out of ethnic groups; they come out of group experiences. So I will have to add that American academic politics is so enlarged that social tensions are included in it, as one sees in the debates on affirmative action in California. That is a way of specifying it, not a way of reducing it in some antiacademic sense. To a certain degree they also are identity politics, but in the academic world, those are also struggles for recognition. If you struggle to have a Chicano Studies program, or an Afro-American Studies program, or a Women's Studies program, or other programs which are being rolled back nowadays, then you are expressing a more general social politics in terms of the framework of the academy itself. E. P. Thompson used to deplore this, saying that the old left intellectuals were gone, and now these are just people in the academic world, fighting over academic theories. But academia has changed, too, in particular in the United States, and today these are not purely academic issues.

X.Z.: *Yesterday, as you know, you were mentioned by someone at the conference as a "red Kant." Reading the first pages of the concluding chapter of your postmodernism book, interestingly, one notices something you have said which is kind of Kantian. You say that there are three levels of things which we may have an interest in separating: the level of taste, or judgment (at which you admit you like many things about postmodernism—food, music, video, and so on), the level of analysis, and finally the level of evaluation.*

F.J.: Did I say that? Interesting. No, I think that it ties in with things we were talking about earlier, namely, the ways of getting rid of the Self so that one could experience cultural, social, and other realities more aesthetically or directly. That is to say, it seems to me that the level of taste is the one at which we surprise, within ourselves, our attractions to certain kinds of cultural phenomena. Suddenly, cyberpunk appears, and we understand something new and important is going on here. Generally we also like these new things; I suppose the experience could also be negative, but I do not think one often does good work on things one dislikes. So the moment of taste is this moment of surprising new perceptions and of realizing new needs within yourself. Then the moment of analysis is one in which one looks at the way it functions, what is it that is new that has emerged, why it emerged, what the conditions of possibility are of this new thing, why cyberpunk comes into

American cultural life at this particular time, for example. That would be the level that I would call analysis. That is trying to determine the shape of the novel, its relationship both to ourselves and to our situations and contexts. Then the level of evaluation is the one in which a historical perspective is going to evolve. That may not be possible for immediate things, but may be possible later on to decide if cyberpunk is an expression of late capitalism or a resistance to it or whatever.

I guess one could artificially divide up this process of perception or thinking in that way. But I am not at all wedded to formulations like that. I tend to think that you are probably right that it could be sucked back into more traditional and even Kantian modes of aesthetics, into something that obviously ought to be resisted.

X.Z.: But wouldn't it also be interesting to see that as a juxtaposition of a kind of Kantian differentiation with the contemporary multiplicity of one's positions?

F.J.: If it were Kantian, then the difference would lie in the Western and postmodern emphasis on history. In other words, I would never want to do an evaluation on some eternal or timeless thing, but only in terms of historical change. Maybe that makes a Kantian system impossible.

X.Z.: Geopolitically, the shift from philosophy to theory, and then maybe from theory to critical analysis of contemporary culture, is paralleled with the shift of power or productivity from Europe to North America. How would you describe this process and also your own role in that?

F.J.: That is the kind of self-knowledge one is probably least comfortable with. I think that, as you know, we Americans have been, in terms of theory, a kind of transmission belt. For example, French theory first came through England to the United States; it was transmitted by Verso, by Ben Brewster's translation of Althusser, and so forth. So England then served as a kind of transmission, at least for us. I think that we may be serving some of that function for China. So that the excitement we had in the 1970s in discovering all those things, now you get in a more concentrated form, because it is delivered all at once.

I know there are positions that hold that there is a new division of theory and practice. The Third World does the practice and produces the text, and the First World delivers the theory and thinks about it. But we increasingly have a lot of very specific forms of theory that come from the other parts of the world, India being the most notable one where that is happening right now. I also think there is a kind of situational, vested interest in the United States of not knowing what it is doing, and therefore of not becoming the center of theoretical production as you

would think of the center of industrial production moving from England to the United States or something like that.

But on the other hand, I am sure that this must also be considered in economic terms. After all it is American culture that is now the principal export of late capitalism all over the world. Therefore the theory of that culture would necessarily go along with it. One can always distinguish between this imperial export of culture and these theories themselves. For good or ill, this has to reflect a world in which the production of the United States, namely entertainment and culture, is dominant. I am against guilt-trips and self-denunciations, so I feel temperamentally that we should not always be beating our chest and lamenting the fact that we should not be exporting our own theories and that we are sorry to be cultural imperialists. I think there are things to analyze in the United States that we have a privileged viewpoint on. If we think about our work as political and cultural intellectuals, we have certain kinds of important tasks to fulfill.

If, on the other hand, as is the tendency in the market society like this, we think of ourselves just as producing new kinds of products that we then want to have diffused, then that is naturally a less attractive view of our intellectual roles. I suppose one of the things is that, unlike the period of imperialism, this new system of globalization really is a system in which intellectuals from different national situations can talk much more directly to each other. They can answer back, and they do answer back.

There is the sense that in large parts of the world the political as such has become hopeless; that the market is there, we can do nothing about it; that the strikes in France or the Zapatista rebellion seem going nowhere, because they do not have an overall political agenda, and so forth. I feel that, too. I think we should think about it as citizens. But I do not think that we are especially in a position to develop new ideas of praxis. But if someone tries to, then we should look at those. I think that part of this is, again, my peculiar position in connection with American realities. Because I work here, I certainly try to have a pedagogy that addresses the United States. The notion of postmodernity emerges from my experience as an American, and I am an American. But on the other hand, part of my intellectual formation is elsewhere. If I had a different formation I would probably talk more specifically about American cultural problems than I often intend to do.

I think that in the United States, we are also relatively limited by this very successful institutional form which is federalism, constitution, and the states and so forth. Politics here, when it is effective in terms of power, the people, the distribution, and so forth, feeds immediately and exclusively back into local politics.

X.Z.: *If late capitalism is the organizing dynamic, then one would expect a global united front of critical, political intellectuals taking shape. So far, however, that does not seem to be the case. Besides the gap between the Western and non-Western societies, various national, regional, and local politics seem to prevent one from thinking in a truly cosmopolitan fashion. How do you address that? Do you think such a united front possible, or even desirable?*

F.J.: Well, it isn't surprising that just as a global labor movement has not yet been able to come into being, so also a genuinely international association of intellectuals has not. Nonetheless, it would be surprising if the technology that allowed businesses and financial centers to speed up their contacts with each other, and in particular their exchanges and transactions, were not seized upon by intellectual networks as well. Indeed, I think this is becoming the case and there is a far greater awareness of movements and intellectual activities in other countries today everywhere around the world than there was in the modern or the imperialist period.

Along with this we have of course the appearance of something like transnational literary works and writers and intellectual figures. Surely, people like Derrida or Salman Rushdie live and work on a level of international exchange which may include various national contacts but which is distinct from all of them. This would seem to correspond to some new form of what used to be called World Literature, which was conventionally understood to include those classics that appealed to a variety of national audiences out beyond the immediate national context. I think, however, that that was not exactly what the expression *national literature* meant when Goethe, among others, pioneered it. If one examines the few fragmentary texts he has left on this subject, one begins to realize that he had in mind the fact of intellectual networks themselves and the coming into existence of new modes of intellectual and theoretical interrelationship, particularly as those were emphasized by the great journals, *The Edinburgh Review*, *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, along with the preeminent national newspapers, all of which he himself read in Weimar. It was this new communicational access to national modes of intellectual exchange that seemed to Goethe historically original and for which he coined this expression *Weltliteratur*, which no longer seems quite appropriate in the new global context. I believe that something of this sort on a far vaster scale is coming into existence today, but that we need to take special precautions to encourage its development. As with literature itself, it does not mean producing ideas that are immediately universal and can thus spring out of the national context and be available to everyone. It means radically passing through each of the national contexts. It means, in effect, that when we talk to

intellectuals in other national situations, the home intellectual and the intellectual abroad are themselves merely the medium for the contact between national situations, or as we used to call them, national cultures.

We must pass through those situations in order to understand any of the intellectual or aesthetic events that take place in the other situation. What transpires then is a genuine comparitism of intellectual activity and not simply the decontextualization of that activity and its immediate spring into the absolute. This obviously imposes on us enormous efforts of knowledge and sympathy. It also imposes problems of inequality and noncomparability. It causes us to devise exceedingly complicated equations in which the foreign prestige value of certain kinds of objects or items has to be reckoned back into the equation in advance. On the other hand, it seems to me to promise an enormously rich work of detail in linking left perspectives around the globe. This is the area in which it seems to me that, despite a momentary political or social pessimism, despite a seeming immobilization in what can be done in the world of collective praxis, there is today an enormous and very rich field for intellectual activity on the left which can keep us busy and productive for some time.

X.Z.: *Thank you very much for your time.*